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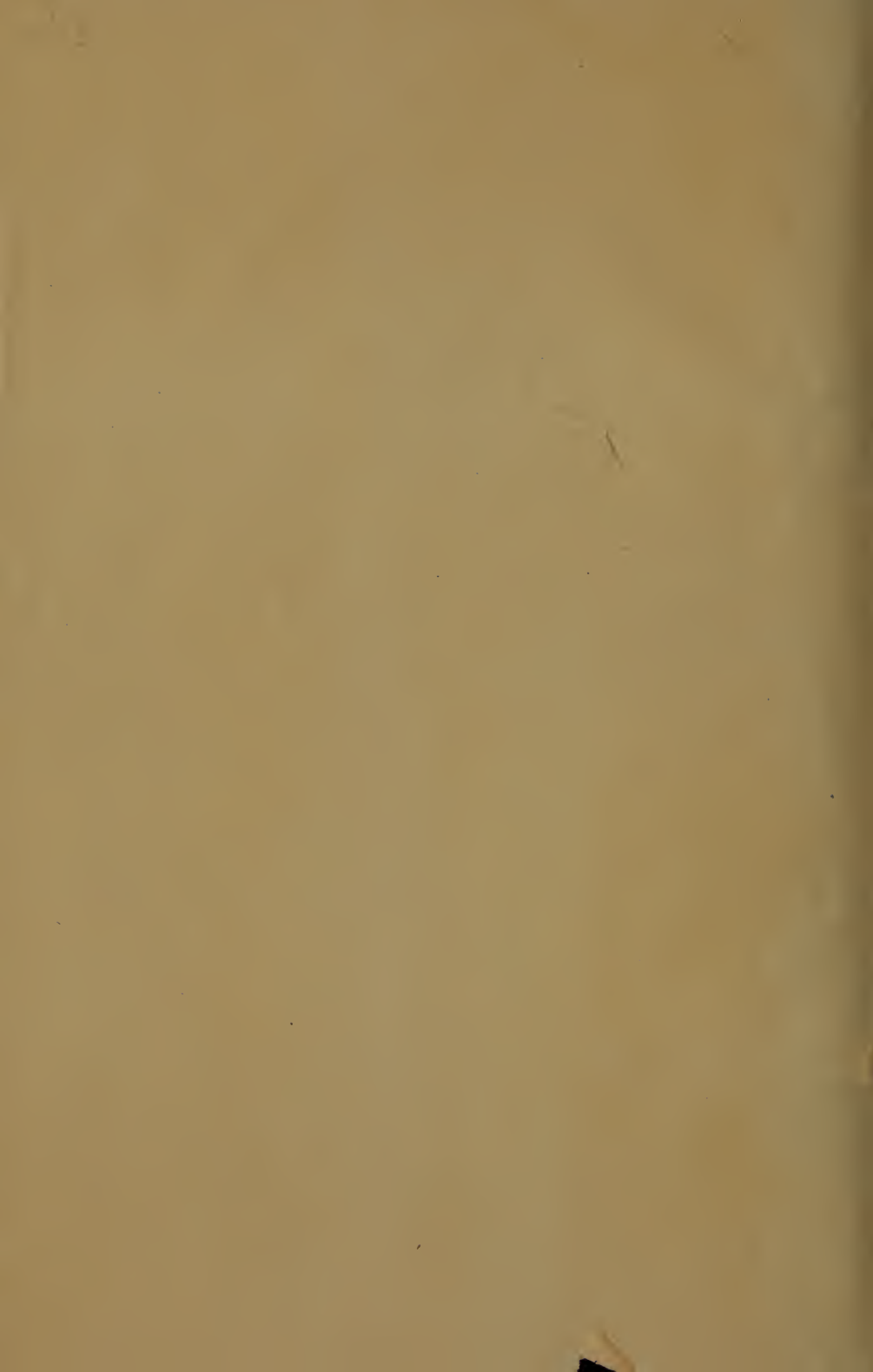
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The
Bloomsbury Group





from "Observations" by Max Beerbohm. (Doubleday Doran & Co.)

LYTTON STRACHEY

THE
BLOOMSBURY
GROUP



Clive Bell

Virginia Woolf

Lytton Strachey



Contents



THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP

I

CLIVE BELL

8

VIRGINIA WOOLF

10

LYTTON STRACHEY

12

"CIVILIZATION"

14

"ORLANDO"

16

"ELIZABETH AND ESSEX"

18



The Bloomsbury Group

“A SMALL group of friends who were undergraduates at Cambridge at the beginning of the century came to have an influence on their time which can still hardly be gauged. Among these were the sons of Sir Leslie Stephen, the eminent Victorian biographer and agnostic. The Misses Vanessa and Virginia Stephen, their sisters, lived in London; and their house became the nucleus of the group, when the two brothers and their friends left Cambridge.” I am quoting from the seventh volume of Sir Raymond Mortimer’s trustworthy if academic *Studies in Twentieth-Century Culture* (Hogarth Press, 1906). “The young ladies, who were as remarkable for their beauty as for their intellect, married two of their brothers’ friends, Clive Bell and Leonard Woolf, who

were to become celebrated, the one as an apostle of contemporary art, a vigorous pamphleteer, a poet, a historian of civilization, and a psychological biographer; the other as an editor, a publisher, and a politician. An important figure in this group was Edward Morgan Forster, novelist, critic, and historian. Perhaps the most influential was Giles Lytton Strachey, who later revolutionized the art of history; he is said to have shown from the first the almost fanatical intransigence in conduct and opinion which marks the leaders of important movements. But the group was always an oligarchy—fierce mutual criticism was the breath of its existence. Another dominating figure was John Maynard Keynes, the economist and politician, who by his marriage years later with Mme. Lopokova, the first dancer of her day, brought leadership in yet another of the arts into this astonishing circle. Duncan Grant, though not a member of the university, was an early intimate of the group, and so was Roger Fry, though of an older generation of Cambridge men. It thus appears that

from one small band of friends have come the subtlest novelists, the most famous economists, the most influential painters, the most distinguished historian, and the liveliest critics of the post-war period in England."

I have preferred to quote from the veteran critic, because my relations with the persons concerned are too close for me to be able to speak of them easily without impertinence. But the name of Bloomsbury is becoming familiar in Berlin, Paris, and, I presume, New York, as well as in London, and I think the time has come when a study of the genesis of the group and the character of those who compose it should be made public. I am certainly not the person to do this; but since I am writing a letter I may perhaps take a letter-writer's privilege and put down a few casual comments on what I see around me.

It is impossible to say where Bloomsbury begins, and where it ends. Are the painters, scholars, and journalists of a younger generation to be included? Arthur Waley? Francis Bir-

rell? George Rylands? Douglas Davidson? Are old and intimate friends who have never become entirely imbued with the Bloomsbury spirit? And in fact what exactly is this spirit? I do not dare a definition. But I would place first a belief in Reason, and a conviction that the pursuit of Truth and a contemplation of Beauty are the most important of human activities. Obviously many of Bloomsbury's fiercest enemies might subscribe to this creed. The distinction of the leaders of the group is that they have acted upon it to an extraordinary extent. No subject of conversation has been taboo, no tradition accepted without examination, and no conclusion evaded. In a hypocritical society, they have been indecent; in a conservative society, curious; in a gentlemanly society, ruthless; and in a fighting society, pacifist. They have been passionate in their devotion to what they thought good, brutal in their rejection of what they thought second rate; resolute in their refusal to compromise. "Narrow in their tastes, loose in their view of morals, irreverent, unpatriotic, re-

mote, and superior," their enemies say. And, I think, truly. For will not relentless reasoning and delicate discrimination make a man all these things?

Such vivid personalities as the leaders of the group could never of course commit themselves to any corporate doctrine of taste. But they have tended to exalt the classical in all the arts. . . .

Obviously there is a romantic poet in Mrs. Woolf, a mystic in Mr. E. M. Forster, whereas Mr. Strachey, for all his appreciation of Blake and Beddoes, remains in his outlook almost a contemporary of Voltaire. But compare these three writers with any outside the group, great Edwardians like Wells and Bennett, for instance, and a certain consonance in the Bloomsbury artists becomes, I think, apparent. . . .

Why Bloomsbury? someone who does not know London may ask. It was Mrs. Desmond MacCarthy, the author of *A Nineteenth Century Childhood* (she and her husband have always been intimate with the group), who, I believe,

first gave it this name from the quarter of London where most of its members lived. It is a quarter honeycombed with spacious squares, where houses built for the gentry in the eighteenth century declined later into boarding-houses for impoverished foreigners and students at the University of London. The houses are for the most part still too big to be inhabited by single families, but the quarter is replacing Chelsea as the home of painters and writers. On summer evenings there is tennis on the lawns, and the vicar's daughters can be seen playing with the bigwigs, ignorant of the dangerous company they keep. Around are figures reading and talking, and as night falls, the mourning veils in which London soot has dressed the Georgian facades become unnoticeable, and in these gardens you may fancy yourself in the precincts of a college. The passing of a quarter of a century is forgotten, the quick exchanges and curious conjectures, the vehement arguments, remake the past; and the commercial traveller arriving late at St. Pancras's from the North, catches a

glimpse as he passes of an unfamiliar and un-
hurrying London, of

groups under the dreaming garden-trees,
And the full moon, and the white evening star.

* * *

Thus wrote Mr. Raymond Mortimer in *The Dial* for February 1928. His words are recalled here because three of the leaders of this Bloomsbury Group are now before the public with new works: Clive Bell, Virginia Woolf, and Lytton Strachey. In addition to his article a few particulars of each of those three individually may be given:

CLIVE BELL's chief claim upon the gratitude of his contemporaries must always be—whatever he writes hereafter—that he made them aware of modern art. In 1914, when Roger Fry had with difficulty, and thanks only to the help of a few prosperous writers and others, set up the Omega Workshops in Bloomsbury, and when the Vorticists headed by Wyndham Lewis, as well as the lone Futurist C. R. W. Nevinson, were experimenting in obscurity, Clive Bell threw a bomb into the centre of genteel London. The bomb, in its simplicity, was called just: *Art*, and once it had exploded none could any longer plead ignorance of Significant Form. Cézanne became a household word and Vorticism had its brief heyday.

Mr. Bell was then thirty-three. He had been educated at Marlborough and at Trinity College, Cambridge. Seven years earlier—in 1907—he had married the elder daughter of a former Fellow of his college, the great Sir Leslie Stephen. Mrs. Vanessa Bell is an artist of high repute.

No sooner had *Art* been detonated—to pursue



CLIVE BELL

the course of Mr. Bell's career—than a far greater upheaval occurred. Europe was at war. Like other distinguished Cambridge people, such as Bertrand Russell, Eileen Power, and C. K. Ogden, Mr. Bell would have none of it. He was a pacifist. In fact, in the cause of pacifism he proved himself a veritable fire-eater. *Peace at Once* (1915) was another bomb, but much smaller than *Art*, and in the din of battle it went off unheard. Mr. Bell was suggesting that the War which was being waged to save Civilization, was in truth destroying it. In spite of him, the War went on for three more years. It remained for Mr. Bell to abandon bombs and show what he meant by Civilization. This he has now done.

VIRGINIA WOOLF is also a daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, which is to say that she is Mrs. Bell's sister. She herself in 1912 married Mr. Leonard Woolf, and together at Richmond, a suburb of London, they presently set up a small hand-press and began producing with it a few books in limited editions, including her own. The Hogarth Press had the good fortune to launch a number of authors who have since become famous; it was so successful that it developed after the War into a real publishing house, and about five years ago it removed from Richmond to the neighbourhood of the British Museum—that is, to Bloomsbury—a district which more and more is attracting London publishers.

Before he married, Mr. Woolf was for a time in the Ceylon Civil Service, as a result of which he wrote a novel, *The Village in the Jungle*. Since his return to England he has grown interested in labour questions, and his later books have been about them. In addition to being the active head of the Hogarth Press, he is now the

literary editor of *The Nation and Athenaeum*.

Mrs. Woolf is a critic, a short story writer, and a novelist. Her volume of critical essays, *The First Reader*, reveals the breadth of her erudition and the extent of her Greek scholarship. In her novels she is a pioneer whose full importance cannot even yet be gauged. She seeks to convey the reality, the atmosphere, the spirit, of a character by new methods. As Mr. E. M. Forster wrote of her in 1926, she works in a storm of atoms and seconds, her highest joy is "life; London; this moment of June," and her deepest mystery "here is one room; there another." She is aware, to put it differently, of the variety of feeling that goes into a single instant and of the mysterious relation which seems to link events occurring apart both in time and space.

GILES LYTTON STRACHEY is Mr. Bell's senior by a year; they were at Cambridge together, and at the same college, Trinity. Together too they entered the arena of authorship, Mr. Strachey's first book, *Landmarks in French Literature*, appearing only a little while before *Art*. If the stir it made was negligible beside the excitement which Mr. Bell's book, *Art*, created, *Eminent Victorians* (1918) more than turned the scales: biography had entered a new phase in the hands of a new master. And *Queen Victoria*, which followed in 1921, must be one of the three or four most famous books in the twentieth century.

Mr. Strachey's has been called a romantic mind. Yet he has found his influences with his admirations, in the English eighteenth century and with the great French masters whose style is chastened and lean. These influences have impinged on his own strong modernity to make him the writer he is.

The events of his life are few: his living has been done chiefly with the imagination. He is

the son of a British general, Sir Richard Strachey, His widowed mother and his sister, with whom he lives, both write; the latter is the author of three novels.

In appearance Mr. Strachey personifies the idea of the cloistered thinker. To the passer-by in the street he might appear merely as a tall, thin man with a great red beard. But on a closer scrutiny the pallor of the study grows visible and the large spectacles no longer conceal the brooding and the vision in the large eyes.

CIVILIZATION

by Clive Bell

MR. BELL here performs the miracle of writing upon a difficult and important subject without ever being heavy or dull; on the contrary he is throughout light, witty, and stimulating. Mr. T. S. Eliot writes of the book: "The author has dealt with questions of general interest in a lucid style and with an honest mind, and he has been clever enough not to sink too deep into these questions. . . . A document of great charm and wisdom."

His problem has occupied Mr. Bell, on and off, for many years. He sets out to discover what lies at the root of the thing called "Civilization." Is it Patriotism? Religion? Learning? Riches? Social Well-being? Or what?

Perhaps the best way of indicating the flavour of this essay is to give a sample of Mr. Bell's style. This is what he says of the war aims of the Allies:

Nietzsche was so difficult to pronounce; and besides it seemed odd to be fighting against some one of whose existence, six months earlier, not one in ten thousand had heard. We wanted not merely to be fighting against things; something we wanted to be fighting for. For what? Belgium seemed too small, not to say grubby, Christianity indiscreet, the balance of power old-fashioned, ourselves improbable.... And then it was that to some more comprehensive mind, to some one enjoying a sense of history and his own importance, to the Prime Minister or Professor Gilbert Murray I dare say, came the fine and final revelation that what we were fighting for was Civilization.

\$2.50

ALSO BY MR. BELL:

Since Cézanne, \$2.50.

Landmarks in Nineteenth-Century Painting, \$3.50.

ORLANDO: a Biography

by Virginia Woolf

M^{RS.} WOOLF has created here a character who begins as an Elizabethan nobleman and ends as a twentieth-century lady, a character whose existence spans the centuries from Tudor days to the present time. Although in the form of a biography, and making much sly fun of modern biographies, the book is, of course, pure fiction.

Orlando is first seen growing up in the family castle, which is visited by Queen Elizabeth. She is enchanted by him and makes him a retainer at court in London. Under Charles II. he is sent as ambassador to Constantinople, and there, one morning, he awakens no longer a man but a woman. *She* returns to London and leads the life of a lady of fashion, meeting the wits and being involved in lawsuits. In the Victorian era she has a book published. She marries and has a son. The book ends with its hero-heroine at the



VIRGINIA WOOLF

age of thirty-six on Thursday, October 11, 1928.

From the long period of history which the tale embraces Mrs. Woolf has, with uncanny skill, selected those things great and small which best develop her theme. English civilization parades and changes at high speed and many historical personages flash by. Moreover, the book abounds in witty and subtle comments on life and literature, as well as on the London contemporaries of the author and on the great writers of three centuries.

There are eight illustrations taken from real portraits of contemporary people.

\$3.00

"A poetic masterpiece of the first rank."

—REBECCA WEST in The New York Herald-Tribune.

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ELIZABETH AND ESSEX

A Tragic History

by Lytton Strachey

IT is now seven and a half years since *Queen Victoria* delighted the whole of the English-speaking world. Since then there has naturally been much speculation as to what subject Mr. Strachey would take next. Now, at last, the question is settled, and it will at once be realized that it could hardly have been so more happily.

In that period of Queen Elizabeth's life which Robert Devereux Earl of Essex traversed Mr. Strachey has found a drama ideally fitted to his sympathy, his irony, and his matchless skill in narration. It is, as he says, a drama both personal and national; at once the love story of the Virgin Queen—an explanation of how Elizabeth loved and kept the love of young men—and also the story of Feudalism's final and fruitless bid for

power. Essex is taken from the moment of his introduction to Court—a gay, carefree lad—and followed step by step through all the successes and storms of fortune till at last, after his wild rebellion, he bows his head upon the scaffold.

It is Essex stripped of legend and sentiment and revealed as he really was. Then follow, to complete the picture, the few brief years during which the loving but disillusioned sovereign survived him, and, in conclusion, her own impressive end.

Such is the drama. There is also the setting. Freed of the dust of antiquity, great characters such as Raleigh, Burghley, and Anthony and Francis Bacon, here strut and scheme again, and the whole of England's Golden Age springs to life at the touch of a master pen.

With six portraits, \$3.75

ALSO BY MR. STRACHEY:

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